

## **The Future of our Fire Department**

The 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish poet Robert Burns is famous for writing: “The best laid schemes of mice and men go oft astray, and leave us nothing but grief and pain to rend our day.”

These words couldn’t be more fitting regarding strategic plans for Fire Departments. Our organizations have been built traditionally around responding to, not planning for emergencies. Just the very nature of individuals who are drawn towards action oriented firefighting seems to be at odds with the need for long range planning!

Nevertheless, S.B.F.D. has developed at least three plans in modern history. The “Fire Master Plan” was created in 1979, in response to the devastating Sycamore Fire of July, 1977. This plan was developed by a committee of citizens, representing a wide cross section of the community and contained 45 recommendations. “Master Plan Two” of 1986 was drafted by Fire Staff, and provided an extension and evolution of the original plan. It incorporated 13 planning assumptions in all areas of community fire and life safety and then provided 3 primary goals that were supported by 14 objectives, with an additional 27 recommendations. The most recent planning effort was the creation of the SBFD “Strategic Business Plan” in 2000. Four major goal areas were supported by 21 objectives. Every one of these efforts deserves full credit, for the time, thought and hard work that it took to develop them. SBFD has always utilized planning as part of its mission, but recently much has been limited to operational planning, and related to the budgetary process. Many of the objectives identified in these plans have been accomplished; many have not. Some would even be good to incorporate into a new plan.

It is now time again for our Department to answer the same questions that these previous plans attempted to during their life: Where are we going (defined by a mission and vision statement)? How do we get there (defined by specific goals)? What is our blueprint for achieving those goals (objectives or action steps)? How do we know if we are on track (assessment and revision)?

I am excited to lead this effort because strategic planning is a way of thinking and acting, not just about the future, but about our Department’s *ideal* future, and then working to create that ideal. Limiting our Department to operational planning has meant that the future was created for us. Strategic planning is a way of looking at the future from the perspective of our organization’s values, mission and operational philosophy. The process is now well under way, and is a joint effort of Fire labor and management. Part of the process will involve community input and feedback. We need your response to help direct your emergency service into the future. What are your expectations from your Fire Department? How much or what kind of services should we provide?

With your help, the Santa Barbara City Fire Department will be poised, ready and able to respond to the demands and needs of the future.

Yours in Safety,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew DiMizio".

Andrew DiMizio, Fire Chief